

Doula Mouriki

1934–1991

With the death of Doula Mouriki, at the age of 57 in Athens, Greece, on 25 November 1991, Byzantine art history lost one of its most productive scholarly champions.

Doula Mouriki was born in 1934, the second of four children, at Ampelokepi, a village near the city of Aigion where her father was a doctor and her mother a school-teacher. She left in 1952 to attend the University of Athens, from where she graduated with a degree in history and archaeology in 1956; she was formed by the great generation of Greek Byzantinists that included Professors Orlandos, Zakythinos, and Vlachos. After spending a year at the École des Hautes Études of the Sorbonne in Paris, attending the courses of André Grabar and Paul Lemerle, she earned a second diploma in 1958 from the University of Athens, this one in French Literature. She then joined the staff of the National Museum of Athens, and became a research assistant in the Byzantine Museum, a post she held from 1961–1965.

This job proved crucial to her future development, for in Athens at that time preparations were being made for a major art exhibition sponsored by the Council of Europe. Entitled “Byzantine Art, An European Art,” it strove to take Byzantine art out of the mists of the late 19th-century Orientalism into the scholarly mainstream of the history of medieval European art. Doula Mouriki herself wrote 237 of the 740 entries in that famous catalogue. The exhibition, held at the Zappeion in the center of Athens in 1964, was attended by numbers of European curators and scholars, and attracted some of them to Greece for the very first time that summer. Doula Mouriki learned much from these visitors, such as Kurt Weitzmann, Hugo Buchthal, and Cyril Mango, as they hovered together over the works of art removed from the cases afterhours to facilitate photography and further study. The visitors in their turn discovered a helpful and intelligent young colleague; many of the friendships made at that time were to last for years, and the rapport that marked those days led directly to her decision to come to America to study at Princeton University with Kurt Weitzmann in 1965.

She received an M.F.A. from Princeton in 1968, and a Ph.D. in 1970; she spent two years of this time as a Junior Fellow at Dumbarton Oaks, writing her doctoral thesis entitled “The Octateuch Miniatures of the Byzantine Manuscripts of Cosmas Indicopleustes,” under Weitzmann’s direction. She then returned to Athens to work briefly in the Ethnikon Idryma Ereunon, and in 1972 took a position teaching general art history



in the architecture faculty of the Polytechnion (The National Technical University of Athens); she was voted full professor there in 1977.

She returned to Dumbarton Oaks in 1978 to take up a Visiting Fellowship and to participate in its Symposium on "Venetian Mosaics and their Byzantine Sources," directed by Otto Demus. She returned twice to Princeton, in 1981 and again in 1989, where she taught a course in late Byzantine architecture and painting in conjunction with Professor Slobodan Ćurčić. The second visit culminated in a symposium on "The Twilight of Byzantium: Aspects of Cultural and Religious History in the Late Byzantine Empire," held at Princeton in May of 1989, and in a publication (by the same name) of the proceedings, which she co-edited. Equally at home in Paris, she taught in her old haunts at the Sorbonne in the spring of 1986.

Doula Mouriki was short in stature and spirited in temperament, with a slight stutter and an easy laugh punctuating the fluent cascades of her speech. Tireless, insatiable in her quest for monuments, her missionary passion for Byzantine art took two forms: a private love affair with the individual monument, which she enjoyed unveiling to the public eye; and an intellectual passion, like that of her master Kurt Weitzmann, for assembling large bodies of new material, working out chronologies and giving it shape for the first time. She started with isolated monuments in Greece, then moved on to the frescoes and icons of Yugoslavia, Cyprus, and Georgia, and to Mount Sinai, taking each new area by storm through intensive traveling, assembling of documentation with the help of the talented photographer Efthalia Constantinides, all the while imprinting vast amounts of material into her phenomenal visual memory.

In a paper delivered in 1973, Doula Mouriki, speaking of the monumental painting of Greece, drew attention to "the lack of a sufficient number of publications, the incomplete state of research aimed at discovering new pictorial material." It was a need that she triumphantly addressed. Despite a heavy teaching schedule which involved the whole history of art, she started publishing almost immediately, and virtually never paused, pouring out articles and books devoted primarily to Byzantine wall painting and icons. These included monographs and articles about single monuments or works of art, as well as major synthetic studies based upon her extensive knowledge of the visual material from all quarters of the Byzantine sphere of influence. Her first book, *The Frescoes of the Church of St. Nicholas at Platsa in the Mani*, produced in Athens in 1975, introduced the frescoes of the church of St. Nicholas at Cambinari, which date mostly to the second quarter of the fourteenth century. In many ways this publication already exemplifies Doula Mouriki's work. The church was remote, and its paintings were virtually unknown. Yet through her thorough examination she managed not only to bring these frescoes brilliantly to light, but also to relate them to the developments in the wider arena of Byzantine painting, from Constantinople to Novgorod. In *Οι τοιχογραφίες του Σωτήρα κοντά στο Άλεποχώρι Μεγαρίδος* (Athens, 1978), she published the frescoes of another small provincial church, that of the Savior near Alepohori in Megaris. In this monograph, now doubly invaluable since the church was subsequently destroyed in the earthquake of 1981, she drew on her extensive knowledge of painting, both in Attica and beyond, and situated the paintings in the context of the Frankish occupation.

In two other books, Doula Mouriki turned her attention to Byzantine monuments that were closer to the centers of power in Constantinople. In *The Mosaics and Frescoes of*

St. Mary Pammakaristos (Fethiye Camii) at Istanbul, written together with Hans Belting and Cyril Mango, and published by Dumbarton Oaks in 1978, she discussed the iconography of the funerary chapel built in the early fourteenth century in memory of Michael Glabas Tarchaneiotēs. Her carefully researched contribution to this volume provided a foretaste of what is, perhaps, her crowning achievement, her two-volume publication of *The Mosaics of Nea Moni on Chios*, produced in Athens in 1985. The church of Nea Moni is one of only three churches in Greece that survive with extensive mosaics from the medieval period, and it is the only one of those churches known to have been built with imperial patronage; nevertheless, it had not received the publication that it deserved. Doula Mouriki provided the first full documentation and analysis of these mosaics; her study, with its very thorough presentation of style and iconography, will form a basis for all future work on Middle Byzantine monumental art.

In addition to these monographs, Doula Mouriki produced many articles on Byzantine painting. Especially important are two synthetic studies, "Stylistic Trends in Monumental Painting of Greece at the Beginning of the Fourteenth Century," in *L'art byzantin au début du XIV^e siècle* (Belgrade, 1978), and "Stylistic Trends in Monumental Painting of Greece during the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries," in *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* (vol. 34–35, 1980–81). The first of these articles was originally delivered as a paper at the symposium of Gračanica, held in 1973, while the second was given at the already mentioned symposium on Venetian mosaics and their sources, held at Dumbarton Oaks in 1978. These two studies provided lucid syntheses of widely scattered material, and introduced many scholars outside of Greece to a wealth of newly discovered paintings and the research being devoted to them. Doula Mouriki wrote important articles on icons, in the collections of Princeton, Sinai, and the Byzantine Museum of Athens.

Many of her papers are concerned with iconographic questions that she encountered in the course of her study of the monuments, such as the revival of antique themes in Palaiologan painting, and the imagery of the Virgin. Three years before her death she published a masterly study of the late twelfth-century wall paintings in the chapel of the Virgin at the monastery of St. John the Theologian on Patmos, in which she drew on theological, hagiographic, and historical sources as well as the art historical evidence to argue that the chapel was originally dedicated to the holy Abbot Leontios, who later became Patriarch of Jerusalem (Οἱ τοιχογραφίες τοῦ παρεκκλησίου τῆς Μονῆς τοῦ Ἰωάννου τοῦ Θεολόγου στήν Πάτμο, Δελτ.Χριστ.Ἀρχ.Ἐτ. 14, 1987/88). At the time of her death she was preparing a monograph on the early fifteenth-century frescoes of the church of the Pantanassa at Mistra, a preliminary study of which is contained in *The Twilight of Byzantium*.

Doula Mouriki's productivity was astonishing: in the years between 1975 and 1978 alone, for example, she published two articles and four books, one of which was a best-selling textbook on Renaissance, Mannerist, and Baroque painting and sculpture. Her monographs are invariably thoroughly researched; the fine scholarly apparatus of the footnotes and bibliographies reveal the energy she always devoted to detail, yet the studies are written with such verve that they remain eminently readable. Ever the missionary, she accepted innumerable invitations to speak at conferences abroad, often furiously writing her text in a hotel room scant hours before the lecture. Honors followed, such as the Gottfried-von-Herder prize from Vienna awarded in 1987 for her book on the mosaics of Nea Moni. In 1988 she became a corresponding member of the

Istituto Siciliano di studi bizantini e neogreci. In her last years, she turned more and more to the monasteries of Patmos and Sinai, where she could find a peaceful existence but continue to work on quantities of new material, this being her truest relaxation and joy. With her husband Takis, a distinguished plant pathologist, she bought and restored a house on Patmos on the “quiet” side of the town of Chora, where she loved to watch the long island sunset or the full moon from her roof terrace situated directly below the parapets of the monastery. She was looking forward to publishing the illuminated manuscripts of the Patmos library, a project she undertook as a form of tribute to Weitzmann and her years of manuscript training at Princeton.

Her willingness to share her scholarly material with American researchers was remarkable. Partly she felt a debt to this country for the training she had received; partly, respecting, as she did, the shared seriousness of purpose of foreign scholars, she recognized their need for proper documentation; and partly, she simply loved to share the beauties of her land. She liked nothing more than to drive off on the spur of the moment with a foreign visitor or student for a distant spot in Greece, particularly the Peloponnese.

Profoundly influenced by her French training, she remained, despite her years in America, a European intellectual with a taste for French literature, for music, and above all the theater; through colleagues at the Polytechnion she developed a special appreciation of modern architecture as well. She was ever willing to jump into life and move ahead: because of a childhood swimming scare, she had rarely ventured out in the water as a young adult, but in her forties she learned to swim; in her fifties, she bought a car and learned to drive, took up the Russian language, and started on computers.

Doula Mouriki left Greece in June of 1991 to undergo what was to be five-and-a-half months of treatment at the Anderson cancer clinic in Houston, Texas. The very week she arrived in Houston, she took a drive to San Antonio to explore its cityscape and visit its collections of Mexican art. It was to be her last field trip. She returned to Greece in November, going directly into the hospital without seeing her home again. Within a few days she had lost her ability to speak, and she died less than two weeks after her return.

In the last few years of her life Doula Mouriki had begun to take on more and more new projects, so enthusiastic about each one that she could never imagine turning it down or having to choose, and she never doubted that with time she would complete them all. The fate that befell her thus brought its own particular cruelty, for it robbed her of the one thing she needed most: time to finish. Yet her legacy is an outstanding one. Through her vigorous personality and commitment, her professional life and publications, she unveiled and interpreted a great wealth of Byzantine painting that had been too little known, and with both passion and exemplary scholarship gave it to the public domain.

Henry Maguire
Nancy Ševčenko